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ABSTRACT

The Local Government Center of Montana State University provides professional education and technical assistance programs to enhance the governance capacities of local governments throughout Montana. The Center offers certification workshops for municipal and county officials focusing on practical and theoretical aspects of government, and a broad range of information about public service in Montana. Onsite technical assistance, which encompasses problem assessment, planning, policy design and revision, and specific issues in responding to local needs, is also provided. The Center is developing instructional materials to supports its education and technical assistance activities and to facilitate its outreach education endeavors. In addition, the Center's Applied Research Program guides the education and assistance programs and also compiles and disseminates information for developing research-based public policy and for evaluating the Center's outreach education activities. The Center has initiated partnerships with other departments within Montana State University, as well as other universities engaged in community education and outreach activities. It also coordinates and provides leadership for several advisory groups affiliated with local governments. Consulting faculty, statewide advisory boards, and publications available from the Center are listed in the booklet. (KS)

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Working with Grassroots Government

A Report From

The Local Government Center

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Working *with* Grassroots Government

A Report From

The Local Government Center

Montana State University
1990

The Local Government Center

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The Local Government Center is partially funded by MSU Extension Services.

The Local Government Center is pleased to acknowledge the generous support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation which has made the last few years such successful ones. We are also grateful to the Northwest Area Foundation whose investment in the future of Montana's local governments renews our commitment to grassroots governance.

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The Local Government Center

The first generation of Americans fought a war for the right of self-government nurtured in the small, struggling towns of colonial America. The effort to govern and sustain the community has challenged every succeeding generation; perhaps none more so than those who will live and work in the rural America of the 21st century.

Some of the problems of community goverance remain unchanged over the years, while others, unimagined even a decade ago, now threaten community viability. What has not changed in Montana or in rural America is an enduring spirit of self-governance, deeply rooted in a sense of place and a capacity for civic cooperation. These form the bedrock of our common heritage and the cornerstone of community sustainability.

But local government is so close to us, we tend to forget just what it is and what it does. In Montana, local government is 56 counties, 128 incorporated cities and towns and several hundred special districts. It is 1,500 elected officials and more than 10,000 full time employees. Local government is police and fire protection; it's clean water to drink and the community pool.

Local government is also property taxes and zoning laws. It is the county sheriff, the city library and the county road department. Local government is the incorporated town of Alberton with a few hundred people and the city of Billings with tens of thousands of people.

Circumstances have changed since our country and our state were founded, but community problems persist. Successful communities are those which develop the ability to govern and sustain themselves.

Self-government and the sustenance of rural communities go hand in hand. The Local Government Center is Montana State University's response to the ever-changing circumstances and needs confronting local communities. The Center's purpose is to enhance local governments' capacities to solve their own problems, to ensure a better future for successive generations.

Museum of the Rockies

Jayne Schleper

The faces and the equipment at the Bozeman Fire Department have changed between 1894 and 1990, but the job of assuring public safety remains a top priority for all local governments.

The Mission of the Local Government Center is:

To provide professional education and technical assistance programs to enhance the governance capacities of local governments throughout the State of Montana.

To serve as a policy research clearinghouse: (1) by assessing local government needs and resources; (2) by engaging in interactive research; and (3) upon request, by developing and evaluating specific programs for local governments.

We seek to accomplish our mission by building and sustaining working partnerships with key state agencies, local government practitioners and associations, private-sector resource agencies, and appropriate university staff. The Local Government Center has seven specific program objectives

1. To strengthen the self-governing capacities of Montana's rural units of local government.
2. To enhance the policy making, management and administrative skills of elected local government officials.
3. To advance the professional skills and professional standing of appointed municipal clerks, finance officers and other local government managers.
4. To strengthen professional communication networks linking elected local government officials with each other and with state agencies, MSU, the University Extension Service and County Extension Agents.
5. To improve the interagency coordination and delivery of statewide education and technical assistance programs and resources to local government units.
6. To provide responsive policy research, analysis and education for the Montana League of Cities and Towns, the Montana Association of Counties, and state and local legislative bodies.
7. To enhance the local government instructional and research components of MSU's Master of Public Administration degree program.

L.A. Huffman, Montana Historical Society

New developments and altered circumstances repeatedly pressure small towns to change – cars and horses side-by-side in Ashland, Montana embodied this phenomenon about 1912.

Origins

In 1984, when the citizens of 98 communities elected to undertake Montana's unique process of "local government review," the Department of Political Science at Montana State University created the Local Government Center to bridge the gap between the citizen review commissions and their local governments.

By 1986, the Local Government Center was overwhelmed with requests from local governments across the state for a much broader range of assistance. To accommodate these needs, in 1987 the Center sought and received a substantial enabling grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In 1989, the Center was formally approved by the Montana State Board of Regents, as an institutionalized teaching, research and service component of Montana's Land Grant University. In 1990, the Center again expanded its activities when it received another substantial enabling grant from the Northwest Area Foundation to create the Local Government Policy Council and a Local Government Policy Center.

Capacity Building in Local Government

Elected officials and local government professionals in Montana must function today under difficult circumstances. A real tension exists between public demands for services and government's capacity to respond at a time when available financial resources are diminishing. This fact seems to be linked to citizen dissatisfaction with government, and even distrust of those whose task it is to make government work. High-turnover rates among locally elected officials suggest such pressures take a heavy toll that may weaken the institutions of self-governance.

Doug Hamlin

Continuing education and training for elected and appointed local government officials aims to enhance citizens' capacities to govern. The County Treasurers' Public Management Seminar puts this principle into practice.

Jayne Schiesz

The adoption of management technology remains a painfully slow process in small town government. Computer technology helps Bozeman City Clerk Robin Sullivan get the work done.

Certification & Training

To help municipal and county officials meet the complex challenges facing them today, the Local Government Center offers a number of professional educational opportunities in public management for government officials. These courses were institutionalized in 1988 with the establishment of the **Local Government Academy** within the Division of Extended Studies at Montana State University.

Certification workshops are designed in collaboration with particular client groups to meet their specific needs for professional advancement. Course work focuses on both practical and theoretical aspects of government, offering students a broad range of information about public service in Montana. Students also learn about specific operations and practices which are vital to their own local government administration. Those who attend receive Continuing Education Units from MSU.

- **Elected County Official Workshops** are provided for County Assessors, County Treasurers, County Clerks of Court, and County Clerks and Recorders
- **Elected Municipal Official Workshops** are held for Municipal Mayors and Council Members
- **Municipal Clerks Institute Workshops** are held for Municipal Clerks, Finance Officers and Treasurers
- **Management Workshops** for Local Government first line supervisors
- **Annual Policy Issue Workshops** are also held for the Montana Association of Counties and the Montana League of Cities and Towns.

In 1989, 1100 student days of formal workshop instruction were provided to advance the professional competencies of local government officials and to strengthen their capacity to govern Montana's small, rural communities.

Technical Assistance

The Local Government Center answers county and municipal requests for on-site assistance by developing durable solutions. Rather than "single-shot" consultations, the Center offers technical assistance designed to strengthen the capacity of local governments to solve their own problems in an effective and enduring fashion.

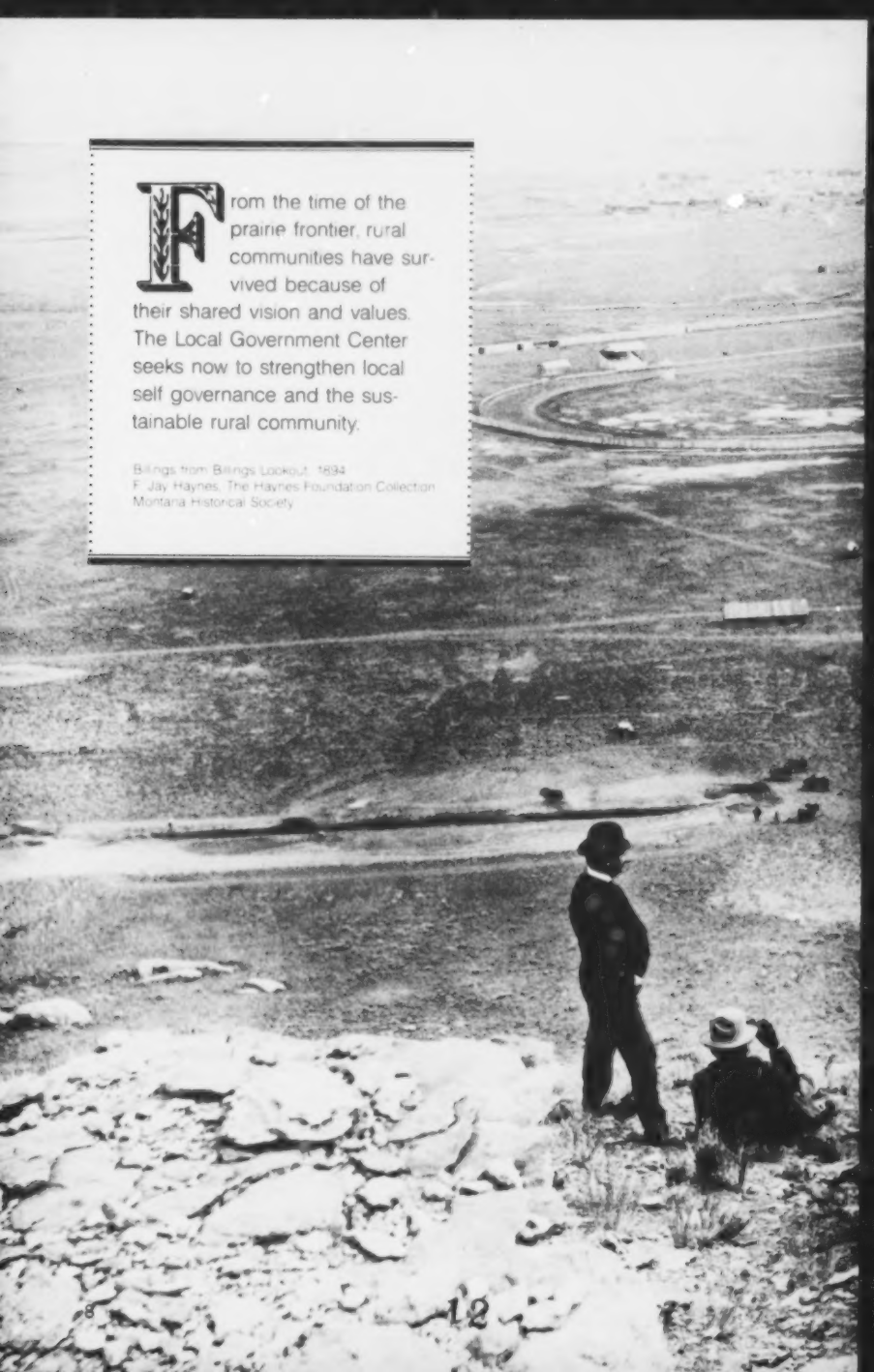
Technical assistance encompasses problem assessment, planning, policy design and revision, and issue-specific workshops which respond to special needs. For example, the Center has developed and helped install personnel management systems for more than 20 local governments in Montana. Over 1500 individual position descriptions for local government employees have been prepared. Model local government charters have been composed by the Center for adoption by local governments and approval by the voters in a number of Montana communities. Budget and goal-setting retreats have been held and new policies have been formulated cooperatively to correct troublesome problems.

The breadth of technical assistance available from the Local Government Center is considerable and it is always designed to address a government's or a community's unique needs.

G. W. Miller Montana Historical Society

Decisions about a community's future are public decisions. This all-male photograph of the Great Falls Assessors Office and Board of Equalization in 1899 suggests how, over time, that decision process has changed.

From the time of the prairie frontier, rural communities have survived because of their shared vision and values. The Local Government Center seeks now to strengthen local self governance and the sustainable rural community.



Billings from Billings Lookout, 1884
F. Jay Haynes, The Haynes Foundation Collection
Montana Historical Society

Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Citizens often forget how tax dollars spent for services today (like public swimming pools and recreational programs) connect historically with . . .

Curriculum Development

The Local Government Center is now in the process of developing a number of instructional materials to support its education and technical assistance activities and to facilitate an expansion in its outreach education endeavors. Among the specific materials now being developed are:

- A model personnel policy manual for small governments.
- A school business officials' financial accounting curriculum for the Office of Public Instruction and the Montana Association of School Business Officials.
- A "Municipal Officials Handbook."
- A model presentation for small community water rate increases for review by the state Public Service Commission.
- A model curriculum and supporting instructional materials for high school Civics classes focusing on community governance.

Applied Research & Dissemination

One outcome of the Local Government Center's work is the accumulation of experience and information about critical issues confronting small communities and their govern-

Montana Historical Society

. . . efforts to alleviate unhealthy circumstances decades ago. This photo of Butte children playing near an open, backyard sewer (c. 1910) is a potent reminder.

ments. This material may be valuable to practitioners and scholars concerned about local government in general, and rural revitalization, in particular. The primary purpose of the Center's Applied Research Program is to guide our education and assistance programs, but we also seek to compile and disseminate such information to provide the basis for research-based public policy, and to evaluate the Center's outreach education activities.

The **Montana Municipal Capacities Project** is one such endeavor. To assess the governing capacities of Montana's rural communities and to discern their particular needs, in 1988 and 1989 ninety in-depth interviews were conducted with small town officials. The product is an "archive of rural government reflections" of interest to individuals and institutions concerned with improving the self-governing capacities of small communities in America. The findings of this project were presented at the 1989 and 1990 annual conferences of the American Society of Public Administration and the Western Social Science Conference.

The **Montana Municipal Data Base** was created to provide ready access for client groups and state agencies seeking to understand the demographic, organizational and financial characteristics of municipalities in Montana. Thirty-five descriptive categories for each of the state's

128 municipal corporations are now computer-resident at the Center. This information will be updated and republished at regular intervals. A **Montana County Data Base** is also being prepared. Both utilize the "dBase" Software.

Carol Ann Schaefer

A sustainable rural community requires informed citizen participation. The Annual Montana Clerks Institute and Elected Officials' Workshop aims to realize this objective.

Montana Municipal Profiles, a wall chart showing 25 descriptive characteristics of state municipalities was distributed to every city and town, all libraries in the state, and selected public agencies. This quick reference tool provides important overview information, such as population, budget appropriations and "year-end cash balances by municipality," at a glance.

A **Joint Venture in Public Policy Education** was undertaken with the Universities of Minnesota and North and South Dakota to provide a series of public policy education programs on issues of critical concern in the four state region. In 1990, the Local Government Center will sponsor public conferences in Montana on two current topics: "Rural Health" and the "Canadian-U.S. Free Trade Agreement." The proceedings of these two meetings will be published for general dissemination.

As a result of a major enabling grant from the Northwest Area Foundation, a major new initiative was launched in 1990: the formation of a statewide **Local Government Policy Council** supported by a **Local Government Policy Center.** The primary purpose of these is to identify critical issues affecting the sustainability of Montana's rural communities, to conduct in-depth research on these issues, and to compile a reliable, factual foundation for responsive statewide and local policy. With this initiative, we envision the development of an institutionalized state-local partnership to address the highest priority needs of Montana's rural communities.

Building Partnerships in Montana and Our Region

To achieve its mission, the Local Government Center has initiated a number of partnerships. At Montana State University, the Center organized a Local Government Center Consulting Faculty. This group explores ways to link the problem-solving resources of the University to local government needs in the state at-large.

In this role, and as a referral clearinghouse, the Center works with the Departments of Extended Studies, Agriculture, Sociology, Civil Engineering, Accounting, Mathematics and Statistics, Geography, the University Extension Service, the Center for Survey Research, the Rural Technical Assistance Program and the Center for Water and Waste Water Engineering Systems.

Beyond the University, the Center coordinates and provides leadership for several advisory groups. These constitute the formal institutional linkages between University resources and key local government associations, client groups, agencies of state government, and private sector resource agencies.

Montana Historical Society

Roadwork done in Ravalli County in 1920 may need to be redone in the 1990s. Government's task is to bring the resources to bear to get this essential work done.

Montana Historical Society

In 1907, the Glasgow Jail and Courthouse were prominent features on the community's horizon. Likewise today, the courthouse, the town hall and the citizen volunteers who serve there are focal points for revitalizing rural Montana.

Among those who serve on the Local Government Council are representatives of the State Departments of Commerce, Administration, Social and Rehabilitative Services and Revenue; the Montana League of Cities and Towns; the Montana Association of Counties; and the University Extension Service.

To make the skills and resources of our broader geographic region available to Montana's local governments, the Center has established a network of affiliations with other academic institutions also engaged in community education and outreach activities.

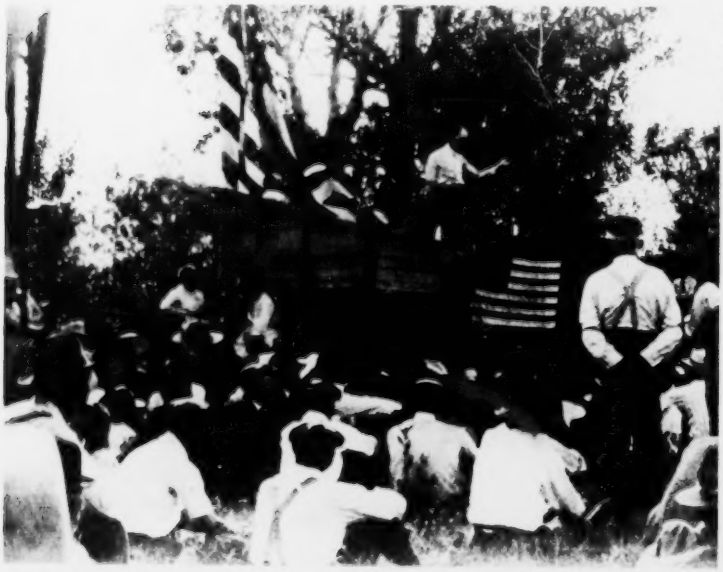
Information sharing, external review of Center activities and reciprocal working agreements are among the various activities undertaken in collaboration with Arizona State University, the University of California at Davis, the University of Colorado, the University of Minnesota, the University of Oregon, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Washington, and Washington State University.

Partnerships are essential to the Local Government Center's continuing process of assessing community needs and designing useful programs. Such cooperation reflects the Center's commitment to help strengthen Montana's local governments by establishing strong working relationships among those dedicated to the revitalization of sustainable rural communities.

Conclusion

Over two hundred years ago, the American Revolution began one of history's greatest and most successful experiments in self-government; the effort continues today.

In Montana's communities, it is locally elected and appointed officials, as well as city and county employees who actively fulfill this generation's comitment to self-government. The mission of the Local Government Center is to provide these individuals with assistance, education and research programs to enhance their capacity to govern.



Montana Historical Society Burton K. Wheeler Collection

From government leaders to residents of rural and urban Montana, all citizens have a stake in sustaining their communities' futures.

Consulting Faculty

At Montana State University

Dr. Kenneth L. Weaver, Director
Policy and Budget Analysis. Organization and Structure

Ms. Judy Mathre, Associate Director
Policy Analysis. Local Government Review and Charter Preparation

Professor Robert Taylor
Demographics. Land Use Planning and Legislative Distribution

Dr. Gilbert Crain
Government Finance and Accounting

Mr. David Sharpe
Group Dynamics. Strategic Planning and Intergovernmental Relations

Dr. Kenneth Tiahrt
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Dr. Alan Jackson
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Keith Haugland
Great Falls Tribune

Local Government Education Advisory Committee

Montana State University Extension Service and Extension Agents for Stillwater, Custer, Powell, and Broadwater Counties

Montana Municipal Clerks, Treasurers and Finance Officers Association

Montana County Assessors Association

Montana County Treasurers Association

Montana Clerks of District Court Association

Montana Association of County Clerks and Recorders

Local Government Policy Council

The Governor's Office

The Montana State Legislature

Montana Department of Commerce

Montana Association of Counties

Montana League of Cities and Towns

Montana Intertribal Council

Publications

The following publications are or soon will be available at cost from the Local Government Center:

Across the 49th Parallel to the Future: A Conference Proceedings, Mary Ellen Wolfe, editor, 1990

Grassroots Governance in Montana, Kenneth L. Weaver, Forthcoming

Monitoring Municipal Finances in Small Governments, John Marks, 1990

Montana's Voter Review of Local Government: A Summary of Results of 1976 and 1986, Kenneth L. Weaver and Judith A. Mathre, A Local Government Center Technical Report, July 1988

Montana Municipal Data Base, An Access Guide, 1989

Montana Municipal Profiles, 1990

Montana County Profiles, 1990

Montana Counties on the Move, 1990

Municipal Officials Handbook, 1990

Personnel Management In Small Local Governments, George Minder, 1990, with supporting videotape

Solid Waste Handbook, James Goehring, 1990

Tribal Governance in Montana, Kenneth L. Weaver, editor, 1990

1989 Annual Report of the Local Government Center, A W.K. Kellogg Foundation Rural Revitalization Project, Montana State University, November 30, 1989

1988 Annual Report of the Local Government Center, A W.K. Kellogg Foundation Project, Montana State University, November 30, 1988

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